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COTTAGE GROVE, OR.

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Portrait Analysis: F. J. Meinzer Cabinet Card (Cottage Grove, OR)
A Cabinet Card from the Barbara Hopper Collection

Jeffrey Hunt
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This cabinet card portrait was part of a collection passed to me by Elaine Hopper at the funeral of her mother—my grand-aunt—Barbara Toner Hopper. Barbara was buried in the last remaining family plot in the Applegate Pioneer Cemetery, next to her son, Ron. Among the hundreds of photographs Elaine entrusted to me, this image also appears in the old Victorian photo album that belonged to my great-great-grandparents, John Lewis Smith and Esther Wells Smith.

The album contains portraits of early Oregon pioneers from both the Smith and Wells families, including members of the Applegate line and the family of Governor Stephen Chadwick, who married one of the Smith sisters. The placement of this portrait—shortly after the page featuring Richard Smith and Martha Ann Pitzer, my third great-grandparents who arrived in Oregon in 1853—strongly suggests that the subjects are members of the Smith family.

The photographer is listed as F. J. Meinzer, Artist, Cottage Grove, Oregon. Despite efforts to research him, I have been unable to locate any records confirming Meinzer's studio or professional history in Cottage Grove. Still, the location and stylistic features of the portrait offer valuable context. Based on the clothing, hairstyle, and photographic presentation, my best estimate is that the image was taken between 1875 and 1885—a timeframe that helps narrow down the list of possible identities.

On the back of the card, faint pencil initials appear to read "B.B.S." The only known family member with those initials is Bertha Bright Smith, my great-grandmother. However, she belonged to a later generation than the couple pictured here. If the initials do in fact refer to her, it's more likely that the portrait was *intended for* her rather than depicting her—a common practice in which names written on the back reflect the recipient, not the subjects. An alternate reading could be "R.B.S.", but no family member fits those initials either.

Current Candidates for Identification

The first image is identified as Mary Anna Hall from the Douglas County Museum – the second is from the Dear Hunt Photo Archive. Based on generational placement, album context, and clothing style, I've narrowed this portrait down to three likely Smith family couples:

James B. Smith (1839–1879) and Mary Anna Hall (1848–1930)

This remains the leading possibility. If the photo was taken before James's death in 1879, the style and setting fit. Mary Anna would have been in her early 30s at the time—but the woman in the photo may appear even younger, which adds some uncertainty.

Maria L. Smith (1843–1887) and Ransom M. Kelly (1829–1914)

Plausible based on dates, though Maria would have been in her 40s during the likely timeframe of the photo, which seems inconsistent with the youthful appearance of the woman.

Mary Smith (1837–1908) and either Leander London (d. 1865) or Jesse M. Barker (d. 1905)

A less likely match, but possible depending on when Mary married Jesse Barker. The age appearance again may be a limiting factor.

Next Steps

Further comparison with adjacent portraits in the album and known family likenesses may help confirm the identity. The Cottage Grove studio location could also provide useful clues if we can connect any of these individuals to that area during the estimated timeframe.

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B.B.S.